



Gemeem Davis, President & Co-Director
Bridgeport Generation Now Votes, Bridgeport, CT

Testimony IN SUPPORT of
H.B. 5004 - AN ACT IMPLEMENTING EARLY VOTING
Raised S.B. 1057 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE SECRETARY OF THE STATE AND EARLY VOTING
Raised S.B. 1064 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EARLY VOTING
S.J. 29 - RESOLUTION APPROVING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING
H.J. 1 - RESOLUTION APPROVING A STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO ALLOW NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING
Raised H.B. 6693 - AN ACT CONCERNING ABSENTEE VOTING - if AMENDED with the following additions

February 22nd, 2023

Good morning Co-Chairs Senator Flexer and Rep. Blumenthal, Ranking members Senator Sampson and Rep. Mastrofrancesco and esteemed members of the GAE Committee:

My name is Gemeem Davis and I am the President and Co-Director of Bridgeport Generation Now Votes. At Gen Now Votes, we are on a mission to strengthen democracy in Bridgeport and increase voter turnout in our local elections. We are a member of the CT Safe Vote coalition and organize our own Unrig Bridgeport Coalition, which includes our important grassroots partners like the Greater Bridgeport NAACP, PT Partners, SEIU 1199, and more.

My colleague and Co-Director Callie Gale Heilmann will testify next on our support of the bills related to absentee voting. I am testifying today **in support of the bills related to early voting implementation HB 5004, SB 1057, SB 1064.**

In Bridgeport, our coalition worked hard through phone banking, mailers, and social media to spread awareness about the importance of early voting. We were thrilled when voters decided with a very strong majority of 60% that Connecticut should join the 46 other states who offer in-person early voting. **Gen Now Votes and our coalition partners stand in strong support of HB 5004, SB 1057, SB 1064 - if amended with several key additions.**

First, early voting must be accessible. The average number of days of early voting nationwide is 23. We believe there should be **at least 3 weeks of early voting**, with at least two

weekends, including the weekend before election day. The hours must also accommodate work schedules and therefore must include early morning and evening hours. Connecticut's millions of voters must be able to vote on their own schedules.

Second, early voting must be equitable. The plan must include ongoing full funding of the early voting operation, education, and communication for municipalities, especially to our cities like Bridgeport where the rates of voter participation among our Black, Latino, low-income, elderly, disabled, and young residents are consistently low. The burden to pay for a robust, fair and just system of early voting cannot be placed on our cash-strapped cities. A strong democracy - literally our way of life - is priceless.

Also, the number and placement of early voting sites must also be directly linked to strict criteria such as population size, equitable distribution across towns, and access to public transit. We cannot leave it up to the cities to provide fair access to in-person early voting. It must be mandated in the law.

Finally, early voting must be expansive. We shouldn't let our state's "steady habits" interfere with the will of Connecticut voters. The referendum results should be confirmed with fast action. The legislature should fund a plan that includes concrete steps for 2023 so that Connecticut is set up for the next federal cycle in 2024. We also must pass no-excuse absentee voting while implementing in-person early voting. In Bridgeport, we know firsthand that doing both of these reforms simultaneously will enfranchise thousands of voters – voters who are often manipulated and intimidated due to the "gatekeeping" qualities of absentee voting and other restrictions around voting.

We must protect the right to vote through state law: **no one in Connecticut's democracy should ever feel entitled to come between a voter and their freedom to vote.** Designing and funding an accessible, equitable, and expansive early voting plan will enfranchise Black voters and communities of color. In order to create a truly inclusive, multiracial democracy in this state, we need real, structural change – and these laws will help us achieve our collective goal.

Thank you,
Gemeem Davis